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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MONROVIA 000168

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [LI](#)
SUBJECT: CONTROVERSIAL POLICE APPOINTMENT OVERSHADOWS
POSITIVE STEPS

REF: MONROVIA 114

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Classified By: Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The recent appointment of former Police Director Paul Mulbah as "Advisor" to the Liberia National Police (LNP) has overshadowed several positive steps by the GOL to reform LNP operations. Human rights organizations have accused Mulbah of ordering torture and other human rights abuses while LNP Director of Police under Charles Taylor from 1999-2002. Despite the public outcry, the GOL seems determined to keep him in place at least through the March 7-8 Women's Colloquium. Positive moves at the LNP include removing the head of administration for gross insubordination, moving Commissioner of the Criminal Investigations Division (CID) Stephen Zargo to the Ministry of Justice to be a prosecutor and liaison with the LNP, and moving Deputy CID Commissioner Sam Sayron, who was accused of corruption (reftel), to the LNP's intelligence unit where he can be less of a threat. The GOL has decided to transfer Chinese-manufactured pistols from the President's protective service (SSS) to the LNP Police Support Unit to provide protection to those VIPs and buildings that UNMIL will no longer protect as part of its drawdown. End Summary.

TAYLOR-ERA POLICE CHIEF RETURNS AS ADVISOR

12. (SBU) President Sirleaf's appointment of former Police Director Paul Mulbah as an "Advisor" to the Inspector General of Police caused a public backlash because of human rights abuses he committed and/or allowed to occur while he was Director of Police from 1999 to 2003. The public outcry was led by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) through a press statement issued on February 16. In the statement, the JPC alleged that:

-- On March 15, 2000, Mulbah led at least two dozen armed police officers to the radio station Radio Veritas studios and closed down the station at gunpoint.

-- In March 2002, Mulbah "personally" arrested then JPC National Director (and present Chair of the Anti-Corruption Commission) Frances Johnson-Morris on the campus of St. Terese Convent Catholic High School while the JPC was launching a human rights program. She was detained with male prisoners and released after pressure came from the Catholic Church and other organizations. The Minister of Justice at the time later called the arrest a case of "mistaken identity."

-- On April 22, 2002, Mulbah supervised the arrest, detention and torture of human rights activist (and present Solicitor General) Tiawan Gongloe. Gongloe was allowed to leave Liberia for medical attention following the

intervention of the Catholic Archbishop.

-- Mulbah led armed police to put down a peaceful demonstration at the University of Liberia that resulted in the beating wounding and arresting of demonstrators and others in the vicinity. He later appeared on a radio talk show and said he had no regrets for his action.

(Note: Other press accounts note that Governance Commission Chair AMos Sawyer and UN Permrep Conmany Wesseh, as well as several journalists were beating during the Mulbah period.)

13. (C) In a conversation with PolChief February 19, Minister of Justice Philip A.Z. Banks said that the decision was made to place Mulbah as an advisor "for armed robberies only" because the public had perceived a spike in armed robberies and the GOL had to respond. Mulbah's appointment was intended to have a "chilling effect" on armed robbers. He said he had heard the rumor that the GOL had made the decision in order to appease the pro-Taylor faction in advance of the March 7-8 Women's Colloquium, but denied that was even a consideration. (Note: we have heard elsewhere that placating the pro-Taylor National Patriotic Party was precisely the reason. Mulbah has not been active in the LNP since taking on the position and is not making any effort to circumvent the chain of command, we are told. End note.)

PERSONNEL MOVES IN THE LNP

14. (C) The Mulbah appointment overshadowed several positive moves by the GOL in recent days in the LNP command structure. Minister Banks is seeking to remove Commissioner for Administration Charles Kowou for gross insubordination for his repeated public rebukes of the Inspector General of

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Police. President Sirleaf must approve the removal as Kowou is a presidential appointee, and we hear that Kowou's benefactor and IGP Sieh's nemesis, Minister of Defense Brownie Samukai, is trying to oppose the removal. The LNP administration remains poorly managed, and Kowou's removal will be an opportunity to strengthen the LNP's management capacity.

15. (C) Commissioner for Criminal Investigations Division (CID) Stephen Zargo was moved out of the LNP and made a prosecutor at the Ministry of Justice, with the responsibility of liaising with the LNP on prosecutions. Zargo, who is a lawyer by training, managed the CID poorly, and was not close to the minister or the Inspector General. However, for Banks the final straw was the CID's handling of a politically sensitive rape case. Ruling Unity party member and Sirleaf associate David Kortie was accused in January of raping a 17 year old girl, a domestic employee. Kortie admitted to having sexual relations, but said the victim was actually 21 and the relations were consensual (the age of consent is 18 in Liberia). Not only did the police drop the charges, but also brought the victim to police headquarters to apologize for lying about her age.

16. (C) Banks was incensed that the police acted without consulting the ministry, held a press conference on the case, and criticized the police procedures, saying that they made little effort to verify the young woman's true age or to follow up on a medical report that the woman had vaginal bruising consistent with forced sex. Given the political nature of the case, Banks had to allow the investigation to take its course, but decided it was time for Zargo to move on.

17. (C) Zargo was replaced by Kabinah Kamara, an up-and-coming officer who was head of the LNP intelligence unit. Kamara insisted that deputy commissioner of the CID Sam Sayron also be removed, and Sayron was transferred to the intelligence unit. Sayron had been indicted for corruption, but the key witness against him (a Nigerian national) was deported to

Nigeria on the request of senior GOL officials (reftel).

ARMING THE PSU

18. (C) The Liberians have also made the decision to transfer some Chinese manufactured Type 1992 Beretta-style pistols from the President's protective service (SSS) to the LNP's Police Support Unit (PSU). While the LNP is generally unarmed, PSU officers who are weapons trained are allowed to carry weapons, and the PSU currently has 50 Beretta sidearms donated by Nigeria. According to Minister Banks, the GOL has decided that the LNP (and not the SSS) will take over protection of several senior GOL officials that UNMIL until now has been protecting, but has ceased to do so. UNMIL in principle has accepted the proposal, but is insisting that Liberia make the proper requests to the UN Sanctions Committee. UNMIL also has reservations on using U.S. trained SSS weapons trainers, preferring that UNMIL provide the training.

19. (C) Comment: The series of moves appear to be motivated by unease within the GOL on levels of crime in the run-up to the March 7-8 Women's Colloquium. The series of positive steps, such as the personnel moves and working with UNMIL to arm some police officers, have been overshadowed by the inexplicable move to put Mulbah in as advisor. UNMIL's decision as part of its drawdown to remove static postings from around government buildings and eliminate escort support to Liberian officials (other than the President and a few others) has left the Liberians scrambling to find solutions. We are under the impression that UNMIL expected SSS to take over these functions. UNMIL has also removed protection from the Ministry of Defense building, and the MOD's initial reaction has been to have its Military Police guard the facilities at night, at least for now. The MPs are presently not armed, and any such duty would interrupt their training schedule. That said, UNMIL has made a firm decision to remove protective support, and the GOL is "in the driver's seat" (as SRSB Loej is quoted in the press) and is determined to find its own way to resolve the security gap. This is also in line with President Sirleaf's desire for Liberia to take ownership of its security sector. It is up to stakeholders to help them manage the transition.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD